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The English Chronicle Play: A Study in the Popular Historical Literature Environing Shakespeare. By Felix E. Schelling, Professor of English Literature in the University of Pennsylvania. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1902. Pp. ix, 310.

OUR histories of English dramatic literature have hitherto been annals of the stage, biographies of the playwrights, with inadequate disquisitions on the development of the particular *genres* that make up the great mass of the English drama. Plays have been considered in relation to their authors rather than to the special class of dramatic literature to which they belong. This treatment, while necessary in our histories of literature, is too general to convey any accurate conception of the extent to which the several dramatic forms flourished. It is Prof. Schelling's aim in his work on the English Chronicle Play to consider this particular species in its rise, its triumph, and its decay, and thereby to bring into clearer light its significance in our estimate of Elizabethan literature and life.

Between 1562, when *Gorboduc* was performed, and 1642, when the theatres were closed, there is record of more than one hundred and fifty plays dealing with subjects drawn from English history or legend (p. 51), and of these nearly eighty fall between 1590 and 1600 (p. 53). Only about half of these plays are extant, yet even

probable than $\text{ʃs} > \text{ps} > \text{ts}$ and $\text{ʒs} > \text{χs} > \text{ks}$?—In § 253 there may possibly be no real shortening of double consonants but one long consonant, like Alemanian *in Hof* < *in den Hof*.

The second and third parts reviewed above are followed by selections for reading. For the prose selections (four pages) Holthausen was fortunate enough to be able to use the proofs of Wadstein's edition of the Minor Monuments (Norden und Leipzig, 1899). The poetic selections, preceded by a succinct exposition of the laws of alliterative poetry, contain three of the most beautiful portions of the Heliand, taken alternately from M and C, and three from the Genesis. The complete vocabulary with its regular references to the paragraphs of the grammar after every word serves at the same time for a review of the grammar.

The material of the book is reliable, the treatment careful, thorough, and independent, the presentation concise and clear. The numerous details of lesser importance are not overcrowding, being carefully distinguished in print. The book possesses high pedagogical value and in this as well as in all other points is an excellent addition to the whole series. It is to be hoped that it will exert a quickening influence on the study of Old Saxon at home and abroad, and that it may entirely supersede the unreliable grammar written by Gallée.

that number must strike one as surprisingly great. The facts, however, that the Chronicle Play bulks less largely than either the tragedy or comedy proper and that its subject-matter marks it off at once from all other dramas, have happily induced Prof. Schelling to make this treatise the first of what is, we trust, a series of works dealing with our dramatic literature in the days of its brilliancy. And here I should like to say that not one of the least of the things for which we should be grateful to our author is his list of the plays with the dates of their probable production and earliest publication and, if extant, the editions in which they are available.

Prof. Schelling departs from the usual interpretation of the term in his treatment of his subject, since he includes not only the typical Chronicle Play, as seen in *Henry IV*, and the biographical chronicle, such as *Sir Thomas More*, but also the legendary chronicle, of which the greatest example is *King Lear*. It is easy to see how the Chronicle Play proper and the biographical chronicle might be merged so that it is difficult to say when we have history and when biography. This general distinction will, however, hold for the most part, that in the Chronicle Play proper our interest is centred in the period and in the biographical chronicle it is with an individual. Thus, while in *Henry IV* our interest in the serious business of the play to a certain extent rests with the king, there can be no doubt that the primary importance of this drama is in the history of the reign. In such a play as *Sir Thomas More*, on the other hand, the "story is told primarily for the hero's sake and neither for the historical events in which he may chance to have figured nor for the artistic possibilities of the theme" (p. 210). The step from the Chronicle Play proper to tragical history, as exemplified in Marlowe's *Edward II*, is also easily made; and at the same time the fundamental relationship in development of these species is by no means obscured.

When, however, Prof. Schelling classes *Gorboduc*, *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, and *Richardus Tertius* among the forerunners of the Chronicle Play and *Lear* and *Macbeth* as its "glorification above its species" (p. 208), he is surely giving a scope to this species to which it is not entitled. For it implies that *Gorboduc* and the rest contributed to the development of the Chronicle Play, and that *Lear* and *Macbeth* were legitimate outgrowths of this species. The fact that all these plays go to the same sources for their subject matter is not enough to group them under the general heading of the Chronicle Play. *Gorboduc* and the "forerunners" mentioned above are Senecan plays with English historical or legendary themes. They indicate the interest

which literature manifested in topics taken from the past of England, and show that the classical drama, like the other literary forms, saw there admirable matter for artistic treatment. What is significant is that, as Prof. Schelling says, "neither the Latin nor the English imitators of the Roman dramatist produced the earliest Chronicle Play" (p. 29). They are not forerunners in development in the sense in which are even the *Hock Tuesday Play* or the Early Robin Hood and St. George plays. The interest of these Senecan imitations is not at all that of the Chronicle Play: so far as that is concerned, the theme might as well be Roman as English. The relation of these plays to the Chronicle Play is merely that of the other poetic forms which chose English in preference to foreign themes. Indeed as Prof. Schelling points out, the suggestion of these Senecan plays was not developed in a Chronicle Drama founded on British myth, to correspond to Roman tragedy founded on Greek myth: they were forced to give way to the Chronicle Play as presented before the popular audiences of the Bankside (p. 173). It does not therefore appear that we have in these "forerunners" an influence on the development of the Chronicle Play as great as our author believes it to be.

The Senecan plays were, however, the precursors of English tragedy, which found its culmination in Shakspeare. On this account there must be shown some distinct influence from the Chronicle Play on tragedy before we can admit *Macbeth* and *Lear* into this category. That the Chronicle Play sent Shakspeare to Holinshed for his plots may be admitted, but that is hardly an influence of sufficient import to bring these tragedies within the bounds of this *genre*. Further, even though Shakspeare based his *Lear* on the old Chronicle Play *Leir*, he has so transformed the play that the Chronicle element has disappeared as effectually as the comedy element of his source. Likewise *Cymbeline* should be excluded and only those dramas admitted, which, like *The Valiant Welshman*, are at base of the genus of the Chronicle Play, which show a development, however indistinct, through the Chronicle Play. These works call for passing mention as illustrating the universal interest in themes taken from British legends, but hardly merit in a work on this subject the somewhat detailed treatment given them by our author.

The essential inevitableness of the Chronicle Play is admirably shown by Prof. Schelling in his chapter on its growth and distribution. He is content to restrict himself to the period of the sixteenth

century as producing abundant materials from the legendary historical past of England for the use of literature, and only hints at the interest which English writers took in this subject from the very dawn of the national consciousness. The drama, which was rapidly becoming the most popular literary form, could hardly avoid making use of the rich matter offered by the chroniclers at the time when all England was aglow on her rise in greatness. And the discussion of the earliest plays of this type is conducted with the single end to show that the "aim of the English Chronicle Drama from the first was 'the scenic representation of history'" (p. 49).

The limitations of this aim were, however, such that their perpetuation meant the decay of this species of drama. Accordingly, as Prof. Schelling indicates, new elements entered into the Chronicle Play, one furnished by Marlowe, the other by Shakspeare. With the former "the unifying artistic motive that crystallised this amorphous mass into a form of beauty . . . took a concentrated and tragic form;" with the latter it attained a "comprehensiveness in which comedy and tragedy become reconciled and the whole range of human life is represented in its political and social relations" (p. 63). Marlowe's contribution is contained in *Edward II*, Shakspeare's in *Henry IV*. A detailed analysis of the former play follows and is justified not merely by virtue of the excellence of this historical tragedy but because of its influence on Shakspeare's earlier work in this field, especially his *Richard III*. The unmodified epic type, with Shakspeare's authorship in collaboration, exists in the *Henry VI* trilogy, and necessarily calls for treatment as preliminary to his historical tragedy. The whole question of the interrelation of these plays with the two *Contentions*, *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, and Shakspeare's *Richard III*, is discussed with such brevity and succinctness as this somewhat complicated subject will allow.

The greatest development of the Chronicle Play was, of course, in the *Henry IV* and *V* trilogy, through *Richard II* and *John*. It is rather odd that Prof. Schelling should have omitted *John* in this connection in order that by discussing it in his chapter on "Later Historical Dramas" he might show to what extent another play on the same subject had degenerated from the supreme epic type. The epic type triumphed by virtue of its admirable characterization, its mingling of serious and comic, its historical and psychological unity. If in the delineation of this perfection of the type our author has not given us anything particularly new, he has presented

familiar facts in an interesting light as constituting the highest development of the Chronicle Play.

Henceforth we have degeneration; yet the elements of decay had appeared before the type was perfected. While some of the earlier plays showed this degeneration, it was, however, natural enough that the "later chronicle plays were more exposed to the intrusion of extraneous influences than the earlier ones" (p. 152). These influences Prof. Schelling finds to be the "emphasis of the element of comedy and the centralization of the whole play in biographical particulars which concerned a single individual" (p. 152). These were, of course, elements proper to the type and naturally permitted development independent of the historical basis. But the historical basis is never wanting in these modifications of the typical play, even though in Greene's *James IV* it is reduced to what is not actual history at all, and this pseudo-history is of least consequence in the play. *George a Greene* by the same author is based on the quasi-history of popular balladry and emphasises both the comic and the biographical elements. Other plays, such as Munday's *John a Kent and Day* and Chettle's *Blind Beggar of Bednall Green*, add the device of disguise, a straight borrowing from comedy proper. Others give special prominence to the elements of pathos and the picturing of contemporary London life (p. 143). Some writers attribute to English characters events belonging to foreigners, and Greene in his *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* has English personages who are so only in name.

The remaining chapters of this work treat of the legendary Chronicle Play, the biographical Chronicle Play, and the later historical dramas. Something has already been said of the classification which includes such dramas as *Lear* in the legendary Chronicle Play. This whole subdivision seems unfortunate. It interferes with the otherwise excellent scheme of the book. The scheme is to show the drama in its development and decay, and this is broken in upon by the chapter dealing with plays of legendary subject matter. The dramas of this group are practically lifted out of their order in development, simply because they are based on legend rather than on history. It is true that Prof. Schelling states that the remoteness of subject led the playwrights to seek to compensate for "an appreciable loss of historic interest" by a "heightened and inflated style, by the interpolation of scenes of humor and buffoonery, or by an emphasis of the elements of the strange or the supernatural" (p. 172). But these elements are not radical nor are

they so very different from what we find in the type. Moreover, they are not developed by our author in his treatment of the separate plays to indicate the modification of the type. What we would know is where each Chronicle play in this group belongs in the development of the species. The fact that the subject was taken from the legends and not from history did not make any very great difference to Elizabethan audiences; their historic sense was not keen (p. 172). They accepted the history of *The Valiant Welshman* with much the same faith that they received *Henry IV*. This we should infer from the fact that this drama itself has the usual construction of the Chronicle Play and the predominant interest in the glorification of Britain (p. 178). We should expect to find the same historical or biographical interest appealed to in these plays as in those treating of actual history, with such slight modifications as are due to the remoteness of subject mentioned above or to any other cause. The establishment of this relation we do not get from the grouping of these plays under the heading of their legendary subject matter.

The biographical play can be followed in easy stages from the typical Chronicle Drama to the play in which the "theme is travel and adventure" (p. 208). The course of this development is traced in *Sir Thomas More*, *The Life and Death of Lord Cromwell*, and *The Famous History of Captain Thomas Stukeley*, all in the last decade of the sixteenth century. Most of the plays of this class are, however, later, and were called out by contemporary events of more than usual significance; those dealing with comparatively recent history by the death of Elizabeth, and the treating of travel and adventure by the robberies on the high seas in the early years of the seventeenth century. This chapter fittingly closes with a short treatment of Dekker's *Whore of Babylon*, in which history, satire, and allegory are mixed in a "very crude dramatic expression of English Protestant sentiment."¹ It is not always clear from what Prof. Schelling says in his comments on these plays, why they should be grouped here. There is really nothing to indicate that Dekker's play mentioned above is a biographical chronicle, and Vennar's unfortunate *England's Joy*, seems to have been more a record of Elizabeth's reign than her biography. However, hard and fast lines of demarcation are not always possible and sometimes not advisable.

¹ Ward, *Eng. Dram. Lit.*, II, 463.

The final chapter is of special interest because of its discussion of the plays on Henry VIII. Prof. Schelling agrees with most modern critics in regarding the greatest play on this subject as the joint production of Shakspeare and Fletcher, with perhaps the aid of Massinger (p. 252), and holds that "Fletcher dusted with dross [*sic*] the gold of Shakspeare," (p. 253). In attributing the famous passage, "Farewell! A long farewell, etc.," to Fletcher, our author, follows the usual critical opinion in opposition to Mr. Lee,¹ and is surely justified in so doing.

One can hardly speak too highly of the sound scholarship which marks this first adequate treatment of the English *Chronicle Play*. How easy it is to surmise and dogmatize, and draw all kinds of unjustifiable inferences is manifest from our earlier treatises on the drama. Prof. Schelling arrived at his facts with most painstaking industry, and where only conjecture was possible, he has not given it the unqualified standing of fact. From what is said above as to the development of this *genre*, it will be manifest that the only logical method of studying the drama is that which has regard to its growth and decay with the influences operating thereto.

Of actual errors very few worth mentioning have been noted. On p. 15, the massacre of St. Brice, is by a printer's slip put at 1102 instead of 1002; the note to p. 106 should have in its first reference "p. 108," the type for the first two figures having fallen out; on p. 188 there is evidently confusion between the dates of the translation and the publication of Higden's *Polychronicon*, the former being 1387, the latter 1482.

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¹ *Life of Shakspeare*, p. 262.